

Western Piedmont Local Coordinated Public Transportation Plan



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and
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Approved by:

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SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), the Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority (WPRTA), the Western Piedmont Council of Governments, and interested stakeholders, have developed a regional coordinated plan that meets the requirements of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) and the Federal Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM). This plan has been developed for the Counties of Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba, including the Cities of Hickory, Newton, and Conover. The region includes the Census-designated Hickory Urbanized Area.

While at a minimum projects funded under the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) formula programs for Sections 5310, 5316 and 5317 must be derived from a locally-developed coordinated plan, this coordinated plan also incorporates activities offered under other programs sponsored by federal, State, and local agencies. These programs include FTA's Sections 5307 and 5311 programs, as well as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Workforce Investment Act (WIA), Vocational Rehabilitation, Medicaid, Community Action (CAP), Independent Living Centers, and Agency on Aging (AoA) programs among others.

Development and content of locally-developed coordinated plans are intended to be specific to the needs and issues of each region. This coordinated plan was developed to address intra- and inter-regional needs and issues, and in a manner that allowed the providers, concurrent with regional Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) updates, to directly update the regional coordinated plan. Further, the coordinated plan was developed in a manner that allows the WPRTA and WPCOG to adapt and expand the plan to incorporate programs and initiatives specific to the region.

Locally-Developed Coordinated Plan

Presidential Executive Order 13330 on the Coordination of Human Service Programs issued by the President on February 24, 2004, creates an interdepartmental Federal Council on Access and Mobility to undertake collective and individual departmental actions to reduce duplication among federally funded human service transportation services, increase the efficient delivery of such services and expand transportation access for older individuals, persons with disabilities, persons with low income, children and other disadvantaged populations within their own communities.

As a first principle to achieve these goals, federally assisted grantees involved in providing and funding human service transportation need to plan collaboratively to more comprehensively address the needs of the populations served by various federal programs. In their report to the President on the Human Service Transportation Coordination, members of the council recommended that "in order to effectively promote the development and delivery of coordinated transportation services, the Administration seek mechanisms (statutory, regulatory, or administrative) to require participation in a community transportation planning process for human service transportation programs."

In August 2005, the President signed legislation consistent with this recommendation to reauthorize federal public transportation and federal highway programs that contained provisions to establish a coordinated human services transportation planning process. This legislation, the Safe, Affordable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act, A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), created a requirement that a locally developed, coordinated public transit/human service planning process and an initial plan be developed by 2007 as a condition of receiving funding for certain programs directed at meeting the needs of older individuals, persons with disabilities and low-income persons. The plan must be developed through a process that includes representatives of public, private and non-profit transportation providers and public, private and non-profit human service providers and participation by the public.

Effective in 2008, the Federal Transit Administration is requiring a coordinated plan of local transit services in order to apply for funds from the Elderly and Disabled Individuals Transportation Program (FTA Section 5310), Job Access and Reverse Commute Program (FTA Section 5316) and New Freedom Program (FTA Section 5317).

General Program Information

Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities (5310)

This program (49 U.S.C. 5310) provides formula funding to States for the purpose of assisting private nonprofit groups in meeting the transportation needs of the elderly and persons with disabilities. Funds are apportioned based on each State's share of population for these groups of people.

Funds are obligated based on the annual program of projects included in a statewide grant application. The North Carolina Department of Transportation ensures that local applicants and project activities are eligible and in compliance with Federal requirements, that private not-for-profit transportation providers have an opportunity to participate as feasible, and that the program provides for as much coordination of federally- assisted transportation services as is feasible, assisted by other Federal sources. Once FTA approves the application, funds are available for state administration of its program and for allocation to individual sub-recipients within the state.

Job Access and Reverse Commute Program (5316)

The Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) program has had a dramatic impact on the lives of thousands of welfare recipients and low-income families, helping individuals successfully transition from welfare to work and reach needed employment support services such as childcare and job training activities. JARC was established as part of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) to address the unique transportation challenges faced by welfare recipients and low-income persons seeking to get and keep jobs. With many new entry-level jobs located in suburban areas, low-income and/or welfare recipients have found it difficult to access these jobs from their inner city, urban and rural neighborhoods on a daily basis. Further, many entry-level jobs require working late at night or on weekends when conventional transit services in many

communities are either reduced or non-existent. Finally, many employment-related trips are complex for low-income persons, often involving multiple destinations, including reaching childcare facilities and other services as part of the work trip.

Section 3037 of TEA–21 required that JARC project selection be made through a national competition based on statutorily specified criteria. FTA conducted competitions and selected projects for funding appropriated in FY 1999–2002. However, beginning in FY 2000, Congress also began designating specific projects and recipients to receive JARC funding in the conference reports accompanying the annual appropriations acts, and directed FTA to honor those designations with statutory language specifying that “notwithstanding any other provision of law, projects and activities designated [in the conference reports] shall be eligible for funding.” Each year, more projects were Congressionally designated until finally all JARC project funding was allocated to Congressionally-designated projects and recipients. Although SAFETEA–LU repealed Section 3037 of TEA–21 and substituted the new provisions of 49 U.S.C. 5316, those projects designated by Congress under Section 3037 and not yet obligated remain available to the project for obligation under the terms and conditions of Section 3037.

With the passage of SAFETEA–LU, JARC funding is allocated by formula to States for areas with populations below 200,000 persons, and to designated recipients for areas with populations of 200,000 persons and above. The formula is based on the number of eligible low-income and welfare recipients in urbanized and rural areas. SAFETEA-LU authorized a total of \$727 million for JARC grants from Fiscal Years 2006 through 2009.

The formula-based program is intended to provide an equitable funding distribution to States and communities as well as stable and reliable funding in order to implement locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plans. FTA continues to provide maximum flexibility to communities in designing plans and projects to meet the transportation needs of low-income people and welfare recipients.

New Freedom Program (5317)

The New Freedom Program is a new program authorized in SAFETEA-LU to support new public transportation services and public transportation alternatives beyond those required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et. seq.). This program is codified at 49 U.S.C. 5317.

The New Freedom Program grew out of the New Freedom Initiative introduced by the Bush Administration under Executive Order 13217, “Community-Based Alternatives for Individuals with Disabilities,” on June 18, 2001. The Order states: “The United States is committed to community-based alternatives for individuals with disabilities and recognizes that such services advance the best interests of the United States” and calls upon the Federal government to assist States and localities to swiftly implement the decision of the United States Supreme Court in *Olmstead v. L.C.*

Executive Order 13217 directed six Federal agencies, including the Departments of Justice, Health and Human Services, Education, Labor, Housing and Urban Development and the Social Security Administration to “evaluate the policies, programs, statutes and regulations

of their respective agencies to determine whether any should be revised or modified to improve the availability of community-based services for qualified individuals with disabilities.” The Departments of Transportation and Veterans Affairs, the Small Business Administration, and the Office of Personnel Management, though not named in the Executive Order, also joined in the implementation effort. Together, these agencies formed the Interagency Council on Community Living under the leadership of the DHHS.

Individuals who are transportation-disadvantaged face different challenges in accessing services depending on whether they live in urban, rural, or suburban areas. The geographic dispersion of transportation-disadvantaged populations also creates challenges for human service programs hoping to deliver transportation for their passengers.

Over the years, in response to these challenges, Federal, State and local governments, and community-based organizations created specialized programs to meet particular transportation needs. At the Federal level alone, there are at least 62 separate programs, administered by eight Federal departments, and even more agencies, that provide special transportation services to individuals with disabilities, older adults, and people with low incomes. Most of these are human service programs that fund limited transportation services to provide eligible participants with access to particular services, such as job training, health care, senior centers, or rehabilitation programs.

President Bush included funds for the New Freedom Program in the annual budget request to Congress since FY 2003; however, it was not until the enactment of SAFETEA–LU that funding was authorized by Congress. Funding was first appropriated for the transportation provision in Fiscal Year 2006. The New Freedom Program is intended to fill the gaps between human service and public transportation services previously available and to facilitate the integration of individuals with disabilities into the workforce and full participation in the community. Similar to the Section 5316 program, Section 5317 funds are allocated by formula to States for areas with populations below 200,000 persons, and to designated recipients for areas with populations of 200,000 persons and above.

Coordinated Plan Elements

FTA guidance defines a coordinated public transit-human service transportation plan as one that identifies the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities, older adults, and people with low incomes, provides strategies for meeting those local needs and prioritizes transportation services for funding and implementation. Required elements of the plan are:

1. Assessment of available services that identifies current providers (public, private, and non-profit);
2. Assessment of transportation needs for individuals with disabilities, older adults, and people with low-incomes;
3. Strategies, activities, and/or projects to address the identified gaps and achieve efficiencies in service delivery; and
4. Relative priorities for implementation based on resources, time, and feasibility for implementing specific strategies/activities identified.

SECTION TWO: PLANNING PROCESS OUTREACH/PARTICIPATION

As the regional planning agency to the Hickory urbanized area and the rural areas of Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties, the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) is the lead agency for the development of this Local Coordinated Plan. As the lead agency, WPGOG along with WPRTA organized a Local Coordinated Plan Steering Committee to get input on developing a coordinated plan. WPRTA and WPCOG formed the Steering Committee consisting of representatives from the following:

- Catawba County DSS
- Alexander County Emergency Medical Services
- Centro Latino
- Alexander County Smart Start
- WPCOG Area Agency on Aging
- Alexander County TAB Member
- Blue Ridge Community Action
- Public Transportation User
- Caldwell County DSS
- Burke County TAB Members
- Caldwell County Health Department
- Citizen with a Disability and Public Transportation User
- NCDOT-PTD Staff
- WPRTA Staff
- WPCOG Staff

Coordination

The coordination of specialized transportation services is a process in which two or more organizations interact to jointly accomplish their transportation objectives. For the purpose of this plan, coordination is defined as “a process through which representatives of different agencies or client groups work together to achieve any one or all of the following goals: more cost-effective service delivery; increased capacity to serve the unmet needs; improved quality of service; and, services which are more easily understood and assessed by riders.”

Coordinating transportation means obtaining more results with existing resources through working with other individuals from different agencies, each with unique perspectives and goals.

Planning Workshop

A Local Coordinated Planning Workshop was held on Wednesday, December 17, 2008 from 1:00 - 4:00 PM at the West Hickory Senior Center. The workshop was sponsored by North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority (WPRTA), Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and Unifour Rural Planning Organization (RPO). The lead organization was the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG). There were 18 participants at the workshop.

The workshop included an overview of the Federal Circulars provided in each person's information packet:

- 1) Section 5310 Elderly Individuals & Individuals with Disabilities Program
- 2) Section 5316 Job Access and Reverse Commute Program
- 3) Section 5317 New Freedom Program (Beyond the requirements of ADA of 1990)

An overview of the following maps contained in the packets was given:

- Current WPRTA Routes & Schedules
- Locations in each of the 4 counties of the Largest Employers and Business Parks
- 2000 Hickory Metro Census Tracts
- 2000 Hickory Metro % of Households with No Automobile
- 2000 Hickory Metro % Age 65 and Older
- 2000 Hickory Metro Population Age 5+ Disabled
- 2000 Hickory Metro % Minority
- 2000 Hickory Metro % of Families Receiving Federal Poverty Assistance
- 2000 Commuter Patterns

These data are provided in Section 3 of this Coordinated Plan.

The outcome of the workshop was explained to be to create a Transit Needs Assessment with the main focus on people with disabilities, seniors and low-income residents in the Unifour. The participants also learned about the "Coordinated Planning Process". Strategies were then developed to identify the gaps and create potential projects to close the gaps. Priorities were set and established for implementation.

A survey was also passed out for the participants to distribute to other interested parties. The purpose of the survey was to provide the opportunity for additional input to be obtained from other potential participants. The participants also reviewed current services offered by the WPRTA.

Individual groups of participants discussed among themselves the transportation needs for the target populations. Each group was assigned a facilitator. They were instructed to create a list of needs and review it for the entire group. After all presentations there was a chance for everyone to vote, using red dots, no more than 2 votes per item per person. Each person had 5 votes. All items were listed in the final plan with the votes deciding the priority of the listing. Non-priority items lists were also compiled and reviewed.

The results from the planning workshop are highlighted in Sections 5 and 6 of this Coordinated Plan.

SECTION THREE: TRANSPORTATION NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES, OLDER ADULTS, AND PEOPLE WITH LOW INCOMES

Population and Land Use

The 2000 Census indicated that the population in the four-county area was 342,142 people, up 17 percent over the 1990 population of 292,408 people. State demographers have estimated that the rate of growth will slow over the next 20- year period, estimating that the 2010 population will be 370,217 (8.2% over the ten-year period), and the 2020 population will be 405,513 (9.5% over the ten- year period). Alexander and Catawba Counties are predicted to grow at a faster rate than Burke and Caldwell Counties.

Growth in the region has been affected by the closure of several major manufacturing plants in the area over the last ten years. The furniture and textile industries, which have historically been major employers in the region, have moved several facilities out of the country. The retail and service sectors are growing in the region and these sectors have replaced some of the lost manufacturing employment.

Urbanized Area

There is a Census-designated Urbanized Area in the Western Piedmont area. This Urbanized Area is somewhat unusual, as the population density found in some areas within its boundaries would not suggest an “urban” designation. The area has this designation because there are several small municipalities with contiguous borders that combine to have a population that is characterized as “urban” (187,808 people, as of the 2000 Census). There is also a significant level of commuting between jurisdictions, which is one of the determinants that the Census uses in its formula to designate urbanized areas. The urbanized area is significant for this project, as the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) allocates public transit funding to specific urbanized areas.

Population Density

The mean population density of the region is 208.6 people per square mile, with Catawba County having the most concentrated population (354.2 people per square mile) and Alexander County having the least concentrated population (129.2 people per square mile). Burke County has a density of 175.9 persons per square mile and Caldwell has density of 164.2 persons per square mile. Population density is an important demographic feature to study when planning transit services. Generally speaking, fixed-route transit can only be supported in areas with 1,500-2,000 people per square mile or more. Areas with lower densities call for more targeted services, such as deviated fixed-route or demand-response services. The current fixed-route service area exhibits areas of fixed-route density, as do areas of Lenoir and Morganton.

Likely Transit Destinations

Transit destinations can be defined as typical locations where transit riders would need to travel to on a regular basis, such as employment sites, medical service sites, social service centers, shopping centers, and major educational centers. In Alexander, Burke, and Caldwell Counties, these destinations are generally concentrated in the County seats of Taylorsville, Morganton, and Lenoir, respectively. The only significant deviation from this pattern is

Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute, which is located in Hudson. In Catawba County, these destinations are primarily located in Hickory, Newton, and Conover.

Figures 1A-1D provides a map showing the locations in each of the 4 counties of the largest employers and business parks.

Employment Travel Patterns

Employment travel patterns based on the 2000 Census were compiled and analyzed by the WPCOG in 2003. This analysis showed that Catawba County is a significant employment destination for the three other study counties. These data provide another opportunity for the regionalization of public transit services. The following commuting patterns were indicated in the WPCOG analysis:

- From Alexander County - 5,679 commuters to Catawba County
- From Burke County - 8,366 commuters to Catawba County
- From Caldwell County - 8,011 commuters to Catawba County

Figure 2 shows these commuting patterns.

Demographics Indicating Transit Needs

The need for transportation services in an area is a function of the demographic and economic characteristics of the population, their access to alternative forms of transportation (personally-owned cars and trucks), and their physical and mental abilities to operate a vehicle.

Need is a relative concept, rather than an absolute one, and so an examination of need must provide for a comparison between areas or population groupings. It may not include a figure for the number of trips “needed” by the population in that area or group, because such a figure is inherently subjective and dependent upon the definition of need. “Need” is likely to be much larger than “demand,” which is the number of trips likely to be taken at a particular fare and service level.

Accordingly, this analysis uses 2000 Census data to present relative need in the study area. Relative need is calculated by ranking each Census Block Group with regard to the density and the percentage of the population in each of the following groups:

- Elderly persons 60-64 years of age
- Elderly persons 65 years of age and above
- Persons with disabilities, non institutional, aged 18-64
- Persons with incomes below the poverty level
- Households with no vehicle available for use

This information is analyzed in two ways. The density of persons in each of these categories has been ranked, and the rankings summed to provide an overall ranking for each Block Group in the four counties. The high need areas in terms of people displaying transportation dependent characteristics are located in the Hickory area, Newton, part of Conover, part of Maiden, in the US 321-A corridor between Granite Falls and Lenoir, the northwest quadrant of Lenoir, in Morganton, along the US 70 Corridor in the vicinity of Valdese, along the Burke County/Catawba County border (north of Interstate 40), and in Taylorsville.

A similar analysis is performed using the same data, but calculating the percentage of the population in each of the categories for each block group, and then ranking the percentages and summing the rankings to produce an overall ranking of the percentages. This is done to determine if areas that have small populations might also have a high percentage of that population in need of transportation services. This analysis shows a somewhat different pattern, with more of the rural areas showing needs, as would be expected. There are several areas that exhibit high transit needs based on the density and the percentage analyses, and these are: Morganton, Valdese, the northwest quadrant of Lenoir, along the Burke County/Catawba County border (north of Interstate 40), areas along the US 321-A Corridor between Granite Falls and Lenoir, portions of the Cities of Hickory, Newton, and Conover, Taylorsville, and Maiden.

Specific Demographic Characteristics-Locations of Target Populations

A series of maps have been generated to show the locations of people with disabilities, elderly people, and people with low incomes. These maps were presented and discussed at the workshop and are provided in **Figures 3 through 9**.

- 2000 Hickory Metro Census Tracts
- 2000 Hickory Metro % of Households with No Automobile
- 2000 Hickory Metro Population 60-64 Years of Age
- 2000 Hickory Metro % Age 65 and Older
- 2000 Hickory Metro Population Age 5+ Disabled
- 2000 Hickory Metro % Minority
- 2000 Hickory Metro % of Families Receiving Federal Poverty Assistance

Demand for Rural General Public Transportation

Qualitative information gathered for the regional study indicated that there is a lack of community transportation services to address general public needs. While WPRTA receives RGP funds from the State and provides limited services using these funds, there is not a sufficient level of unrestricted funds to provide a significant level of rural general public transportation.

In order to try to quantify the unmet need for general public transportation for the “Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority Implementation Plan,” a model was used to predict the number of general public trips that could be expected given a particular level of service. The factors in the model include: senior population, people with disabilities, population residing in families with income below poverty, vehicle miles of service available, and size of County. For vehicle miles of service available, the most recent total miles for each of the four previously operating systems were used.

This model was only designed for rural areas, thus the WPRTA fixed-route service area was not included. The model predicted that there is a significant level of unmet demand for rural general public transportation in the region.

SECTION FOUR: CURRENT TRANSPORTATION SERVICES AND RESOURCES

History of Public Transit in the Unifour Area

Consolidation of public transportation operations has recently taken place for Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties to form the Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority (WPRTA). Before this consolidation, community transportation was provided separately by each county. In Alexander County, community transportation was provided by Alexander County Transportation (ACT); in Burke County, services were provided by the Burke County Transit Administration (BCTA); in Caldwell County, services were provided by the Caldwell County Area Transit System (CCATS); and in Catawba County, services were provided by the Piedmont Wagon Transit System (PWTS). The only areas of the four counties that had fixed route transit were the Catawba County Cities of Hickory, Newton, and Conover (provided by PWTS).

In 2002, Caldwell County was awarded a planning grant from the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) to develop a transportation improvement plan for the four-county area that would examine the feasibility of such a consolidation and recommend a course of action. A consultant was hired to develop the plan and a draft report was completed in December, 2004. The plan provided a foundation for the development of a consolidated system, including conceptual consensus from each of the counties; however, there were not enough planning resources at the time to fully develop the concept and build community support.

The 2004 plan recommended the development of a new regional authority and also recommended further planning work to develop the vehicle and facility needs and available resources, to develop more specific budget numbers (based on the timeline for actual implementation), to build community consensus, and to prepare specific scenarios for addressing partial authority participation.

In 2005, the City of Hickory issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) to conduct the detailed planning work needed to move forward with an implementation plan for a regional community transportation system. The City was able to access Federal Section 5307 planning funds, combined with the North Carolina Department of Transportation-Public Transportation Division (NCDOT-PTD) matching funds, to finance the study. KFH Group, Inc. was hired to complete the study and work was initiated in May, 2006. The WPCOG served as a facilitator for the project.

A study Committee, comprised of representatives from all four counties and the NCDOT-PTD, met regularly to guide the progress of the Regional Transportation Implementation Plan.

Officials in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba counties along with the municipalities of Hickory, Newton and Conover passed resolutions to create the Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority. The organization was the first regional public transportation authority with consolidated urban-rural transit service in the state. The transit authority assumed operations of the rural and urban transit systems in the four-county region on July 1, 2008.

The following four service providers were consolidated:

- Alexander County – community transportation provided by Alexander County Transportation, a county-operated system
- Burke County – community transportation provided by Burke County Transit Administration Inc., a nonprofit agency
- Caldwell County - community transportation provided by Caldwell County Area Transit System Inc., a nonprofit agency
- Catawba County – Piedmont Wagon Transit System, operated by the city of Hickory, which provides community transportation to county residents and fixed-route service for the cities of Hickory, Newton and Conover

Mission Statement and Goals

The mission of the Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority (WPRTA) and Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) is to develop and maintain an effective, efficient, and safe system of public transportation services within Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties which is responsive to the mobility needs of the region.

Transportation services provided shall be designed to maintain and encourage the use of public transportation and shall contribute to the economic vitality of the community, the conservation of natural resources and the protection of the environment.

The goals of WPRTA are as follows:

1. Provide cost effective transportation services which optimize the utilization of personnel, vehicles, and other resources.
2. Provide transportation services which meet the mobility needs of the community, within available financial resources.
3. Develop funding options which assure the continued stable operation of transportation services at a public subsidy level acceptable to the community.
4. Develop policies which assure, as much as possible, that transit services are designed and operated to encourage maximum utilization by the community. Service should be provided first in areas where the greatest potential for use exists.
5. Promote the use of public transportation services within the community. This includes both providing adequate and up-to-date information on services available and aggressively marketing the transit system.
6. Expand public transportation to new areas of the community as demand estimates and population densities indicate that service will be sufficiently utilized within established service standards.

Currently Available Public Transportation Services Offered by WPRTA

- Urban fixed route transit services in the Hickory, Newton & Conover (H/N/C) area. **(Figure 10)**
- Fixed route transit service in Taylorsville. **(Figure 11)**
- ADA complementary paratransit service.
- Limited rural and urban general demand response service in each of the four counties.

- Non-emergency medical transportation for seniors and the general public.
- Human service agency transportation for the following programs:
 - DSS employment transportation programs in Alexander, Burke, and Catawba Counties:
 - used to fix cars, purchase drivers' insurance, or buy down rides.
Generally demand exceeds funding.
 - DSS Employment transportation in Caldwell County using ROAP funds
 - DSS Medicaid transportation program
 - Vocational Rehabilitation
 - Burke Literacy
 - Caldwell Family Resource Center
 - Burke Council on Alcoholism
 - Adult Day Care
 - Developmentally Disabled groups
 - Home and Community Care Block Grant Programs
 - Elderly passengers
- General and Medical demand response transportation.
- Private transportation providers operate in Burke County, providing trips brokered by WPRTA.

Other Human Service Transportation Providers

	Provider	Address	Telephone #
1	Catawba County Department of Social Services	3030 11 th Avenue Dr. NE, Hickory	(828) 695-5600
2	Caldwell County Department of Social Services	2345 Morganton Blvd., Lenoir, NC	(828) 426-8200

Private Transportation Providers

The following private transportation providers currently operate in the region:

	Provider	Address	Telephone #
1	Ace Cab	385 E. Fleming Drive, Morganton, NC	(828) 437-6767
2	City Cab	216 Avery Avenue, Morganton, NC	(828) 437-2594
3	Diamond Cab	604 1 st Avenue SW, Hickory, NC	(828) 322-5555
4	Handi-Care Inc.	304 S. Main Street, Drexel, NC	(828) 437-8429
5	Dixie Cab	307 W. Union Street, Morganton, NC	(828) 437-5584
6	Yellow Cab	117 1 st Avenue SW, Hickory, NC	(828) 322-1133
7	Medivan Transportation	3744 Springs Road, Hickory, NC	(828) 441-2000
8	Burke Christian Tours	4643 Hwy 16 South, Maiden, NC	(828) 465-3900
9	Catawba Valley Medical	409-B S. Sterling Street, Morganton, NC	(828) 437-8808
10	Howard's Cab	403 NW Main Street, Lenoir, NC	(828) 754-3471
11	Medical Transportation	400-B E. Concord Street, Morganton, NC	(828) 438-5003
12	Caldwell Opportunities	1617 SW College Avenue, Lenoir, NC	(828) 757-5680
13	Specialty Transportation	2720 N. Main Avenue, Newton, NC	(828) 464-9738

SECTION FIVE: UNMET TRANSPORTATION NEEDS AND ISSUES

Workshop participants identified a number of primary and secondary unmet transportation needs in the Western Piedmont Region. **Subsequently, members of the WPRTA Transportation Advisory Board also expanded on the needs identified by the workshop participants as part of their continuing review process.** These are listed below.

Primary Unmet Transportation Needs

- There is a need for:
 - Expanded routes into surrounding counties
 - Improved frequency of service
 - Expanded fixed route services, both urban and rural
 - Increased rural fixed route service
 - Later service hours- until 10:00 p.m.
 - Increased van service on weekends
 - Sunday service for church and employment
 - Additional availability of demand response van services for seniors and others.
 - Circulator service in the Newton/Conover area (neighborhood/van) for unserved and under-served areas of the cities.
 - Exploring the potential for fixed routes to Winston-Salem/Durham/Charlotte.
 - Serving additional trip needs, such as shopping.
 - Extending service to the ECCM facility in Newton
 - A Mobility Manager
 - Improved accessibility and sidewalks to bus stops
 - **Improved Service Accessibility for Elderly and Disabled individuals**
 - Vocational transportation for disabled individuals
 - Voice activation for the visually impaired
 - Education programs to teach riders about the rules and regulations.
 - Expanded private partnerships
 - Inter-County transport. Advocate cross-county ROAP funding. Convince other counties to buy into private transportation and State/Federal requirements. Hold regional group meetings.
 - Additional locations for purchase of transit passes.
 - Bus stations in other counties.
 - Child securement devices for families so that transit is safe and accessible for children.

Secondary Transportation Needs

Workshop participants also identified the following secondary transportation needs and issues:

- Educating Schedulers in Maximizing usage of Vans Cancellation Policy - Allows for more service, limit time for scheduling in advance

- Expand Scheduling Availability
- Awareness of Service Availability
- Communicate Transit Program (Public Outreach)
- Caldwell Community College transit needs (Buy Vans)
- **Expand Transportation Service to all area community Colleges.**
- Vanpooling and Consistency between agencies by County
- Coordination between Human Service Agencies
- Extension of Services to Medical Facilities (Fixed Route)
- Increased Funding Need for Seniors Non-Emergency Medical
- Need to Maintain Existing Services

A summary of unmet transportation needs is included in Appendix A of this Plan. The transportation needs are grouped by priority.

SECTION SIX: RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES, POTENTIAL PROJECTS, AND IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES

Recommended Strategies and Potential Projects

Recommended strategies and potential projects were derived from two major sources: the 2008 WPRTA Implementation Plan and the Coordinated Planning Workshop. This section documents these strategies and projects.

While the WPRTA Implementation Plan was not primarily a service planning study, some logical service expansion ideas were discussed during development of the Plan. These concepts are based on the configuration of the urbanized area, coupled with the current demand for human service agency-based trips. The funding flexibility currently permitted for Federal Section 5307 transit providers in small urban areas would allow the introduction of deviated fixed-route services in the two urbanized corridors that do not currently have regular route service. Human service agency-based trips can be provided along these routes and the revenues derived from the agencies can be used as local match for the federal funds.

These corridors include the Lenoir to Hickory Corridor along US 321-A and the Morganton to Hickory Corridor along US 70. These corridor routes would have a fixed schedule with specific pick-up points, with some additional time added to the schedule for deviations. In order to make this service cost effective, it is proposed that these routes be based on the current human service agency demand for service in these corridors, with the current human service riders scheduled on these routes.

Other new services that could be developed in the region were cited in the 2008 Regional Plan and were discussed at the Coordinated Planning Workshop, including the following:

- Corridor service from Taylorsville to Hickory (NC 16 and NC 127)
- Corridor service from Taylorsville to Statesville (US 64 and NC 90)
- Circulator service in Morganton
- Circulator service in Lenoir
- Additional specific employment transportation service with extended hours/days of service
- Additional rural general public demand response/other modes of service delivery
- Additional human service contractual trips
- Additional urban general public demand response/other modes of service delivery
- Additional group type trips to support senior and disabled transportation to destinations such as congregate meals, group shopping, dialysis and more

Implementation Priorities

In addition to identifying the regions' transportation needs and what activities to coordinate, the Local Coordinated Plan Steering Committee also considered its priorities and how to implement them. It was important that the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) agree to be the lead agency given its flexibility and its ability to provide structure and institutional support on behalf of the local community.

As indicated by the facilitators at the planning workshop, one goal of the planning process was to examine public transportation services that are provided within the four counties of Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba. The needs and activities identified by the Steering Committee in terms of their priorities demand certain actions that are essential in the implementation of the Local Coordinated Public Transportation Plan. Therefore, it is important to place these actions in a strategic order, for example, actions that require little funding, are needed in order to begin other efforts or have already begun to develop, should be part of the first phase of implementation. Others may require more time to implement because they require federal and state participation.

Below is a list of action items.

- WPRTA Education and Outreach – In an effort to meet some of the identified needs, it is necessary to provide information and coordinate with stakeholders: the Departments of Social Services and other human service agencies, such as, Exodus House, Centro Latino, faith based organizations and, indeed, the NC Department of Transportation-Public Transportation Division, on how best to address these needs. Local businesses are also important. The implementation of the new fixed route service in Taylorsville is the successful outcome of WPRTA education and outreach efforts with the elected officials of the town.
- Identify opportunities to increase funding for human service transportation to meet some of the specific needs that are identified in the plan
The WPCOG can guide discussions among the Steering Committee members to develop a common message regarding the need to enhance human service transportation in the region and to identify specific methods to communicate these needs to decision makers. For example, it may prove helpful to develop fact sheets and other educational materials to inform local Boards of Commissioners and City and Town Councils of regional human service coordination goals, including the need for additional funding. It could also be beneficial to coordinate visits to elected officials to present the materials in person. A long-term strategy could also consist of identifying and seeking future opportunities, which have the potential for a dedicated funding to support human service transportation services and programs.

Some grant programs, such as (1) Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities (Sections 5310), Job Access and Reverse Commute Program (Section 5316) and the New Freedom Program (Section 5317), may also be available to assist in implementing programs to support the region's coordination goals. The WPRTA should seek out such opportunities and prepare grant applications.

- Identify opportunities for pooling or sharing human service transportation agency funding across the service area

Transportation funds are received by a multitude of human service agencies located within the service area. Developing better communication and coordination of this funding would maximize the availability of funding to the community. Referral of

clients to other appropriate agencies for transportation funding is important for optimization of all available transportation funds.

- Identify Opportunities for vehicles sharing

WPRTA and the WPCOG can develop guidelines to implement vehicle sharing among community-based organizations where practical. Because of its complexity, it will involve written agreements. A number of organizations own vehicles that are not operated in maximum service and could be available to others who either have no vehicle or need an additional vehicle to supplement their fleet at peak periods. Insurance, maintenance and fees or in-kind payments will be some of the issues that would need to be addressed. The WPRTA could create a network of providers through its website, where they could learn which agencies may have vehicles available during evenings and weekends that could be used by human service agencies for their clients' activities.

- Establish guidelines for joint driver training

Several human service agencies in the region own their own vehicles. The WPRTA provides training for its drivers. One can envision that combining resources to offer joint training could have several advantages:

- An interchangeable pool of drivers for agency participants, who may need back-up drivers from time to time;
- Consistent quality assurance of drivers who have been through the training; and
- Less redundancy in training, now performed by individual agencies, which may gain them time for other tasks more critical to their core mission.

WPRTA, with its driver training infrastructure in place, could take the initial step in drafting guidelines for a joint driver training program.

- Conduct an evaluation of programs activities on an annual basis; report findings to the Transportation Advisory Board

The WPCOG and WPRTA will be responsible for collecting data and monitoring the coordination activities. The resulting information should be compared to the expectations developed as a short-term strategy. It is also important to document a more qualitative assessment of coordination activities to assess barriers that may have prevented successful program implementation, lessons learned or strategies that have been proven especially effective. The results of this evaluation should be shared with relevant stakeholder groups and future work should be modified to meet revised expectations.